

Gerald Griffin as a Christian Brother

By A Christian Brother

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Gerald Griffin, poet and novelist, was born in Limerick, 12th December, 1803. When he was seven years old the family removed to Fairy Lawn, a residence beautifully situated on the Shannon. Here Gerald's strong literary taste began to develop under the fostering care of his accomplished mother. In 1820 he went to live with his brother, Dr. Griffin, in the pretty village of Adare. The sylvan beauties of this retreat, its ivied ruins and historical associations, made a profound impression on his young imagination. While here his career as an author began. He produced many short poems, and before he was twenty years old had written his fourth tragedy, "Gisippus." In his twentieth year, full of literary aspirations, he went to London. His classical dramas but little suited the vitiated public taste of the day. In the field of fiction, however, he was signally successful. "Hollantide," his first tales, produced a marked effect. Then followed in quick succession "Tales of the Munster Festivals," "The Collegians," "The Invasion," "Tales of the Jury Room," "Poems," "Barber of Bantry," "Duke of Monmouth," "Tales of the Senses," &c. As a delineator of Irish character Griffin stands unrivalled. "The Collegians" is his masterpiece. Carleton, his great contemporary, gives it the first place in the school of Irish, if not of European fiction. It has been dramatised by Boucicault in his "Colleen Bawn," and produced on the lyric stage by Benedict in his "Lily of Killarney." In 1838 he entered the Order of the Christian Brothers, North Richmond Street, Dublin, where the Novitiate was then, and he was subsequently stationed at the Brothers House, North Monastery, Cork. In the last year of his life he had made some progress in a highly interesting tale entitled "The Holy Island." This was to be the first of a series of moral tales which he had intended to write. He died at the North Monastery, Cork, 12th June, 1840, aged 36, leaving behind him, with his reputation as a graphic writer, the memory of a genial, lovable, and saintly companion.

Entry into Religious Life

In 1838 the Monastery, North Richmond street, Dublin, was the seat of the Novitiate of the Irish Christian Brothers Institute. The venerated Superior-General, Brother Michael Paul O'Riordan, and his two assistants, resided there at that time. This fine establishment is usually styled the "O'Connell Schools," from the fact that the foundation stone was laid by the "Liberator" in 1828. It consists of three blocks of buildings. The residence and handsome oratory form a splendid pile, and the spacious and well-appointed schools, capable of accommodating 800 boys, and running at right angles to the residence, form another imposing structure. It was here Gerald Griffin entered as a Postulant on the 8th of September, 1838, Feast of Our Lady's Nativity, in the 35th year of his age.

From the moment he entered the Novitiate he had but one object before his mind — the living entirely for God, the acquiring of the virtues of his new state, and the fitting himself well for the faithful and efficient discharge of the great work of Christian education. His "Notes" and "Letters to his Friends" are full of the noblest sentiments and resolves on these heads. The following will suffice for illustration.

In a letter to his brother, Dr. Daniel Griffin, Limerick, written soon after his entrance, he says — "I think long as I was without embracing the religious state, mine was always one of those minds of which St. Gregory speaks, when he says — 'There are some souls that cannot be saved except in religion.' Its restraints and freedom from temptation, to say nothing of its other graces, were necessary to one so easily caught by everything that favoured inclination and self-love." Again, in one of his shorthand notes, he writes — "I have entered this house, North Richmond street, Dublin, at the gracious call of God, to die to the world and to live to Him: all is to be changed; all my own pursuits henceforward to be laid aside, and those only embraced which He points out to me. Give me grace, O my God, to close my mind against all that has been, or may be, in which Thou hast no part, that it be not like a roofless building, where all kinds of birds, clean and unclean, fly in and out without hindrance, but like an enclosed tabernacle devoted solely to Thy use and to Thy love."

As to the happiness he found in religion, he writes again, later on, to his brother, the Doctor — "Nothing, indeed, could equal the degree of content and even felicity I enjoy in my present state;" and "the more I see of a religious life, the more I feel the truth of what is said by one of the spiritual writers — 'that if God did not please to keep its happiness secret the whole world would be running into it.' Those miserable years I spent in London, whatever it may prove for the next world, it has been to me, through God's infinite mercy, a complete specific for this; nor would I exchange the peace of heart they have procured me for the fame of all the Scotts and Shakespeares that ever strutted their hour upon the stage of this little brief play which they call Life."

After a few days in the Novitiate he had, according to monastic custom, to shave off his handsome beard. His appearance, to those who knew him before this operation had been performed, seemed much altered. A sister of his had entered the Order of the Sisters of Charity a few years previously to his leaving the world. She was then stationed in Dublin, and both were naturally anxious for an interview. It was arranged that Gerald should go to the convent and see her. He was accompanied by Br. James Bernard Duggan, the Master of Novices. They waited her coming in the parlour. She soon entered, and on beholding her brother, before embracing or speaking to him, lifting her hands, exclaimed— "O Gerald, where are your whiskers?" This caused them all much amusement. This was the sister whose profession suggested his beautiful poem, "The Sister of Charity" — "She once was a lady of honour and wealth," etc.

Gerald was in personal appearance tall, well formed, and handsome, and, though rather slender, possessed considerable muscular strength. His new mode of life seemed to agree very well with his constitution; and the early rising, various exercises of the day, the great work of the Institute, daily teaching for six hours, all seemed to have for him the greatest pleasure and attraction. He was a person of rather quick temper, much more so, indeed, than one would readily be brought to believe from ordinary intercourse with him. His usual demeanour, however, was that of mildness and gentleness; he showed a great degree of self-possession under provocation, and he had a great command or control over his feelings.

He received the Habit of the Institute on the Feast of St. Teresa, 15th October, not long after his entrance. One of the Brothers who was present at the Reception states — "The earnestness with which he demanded the Habit at the altar and the fervour with which he offered himself to be henceforth consecrated to the service of God, affected to tears all who had the good fortune to be present at the heart-touching ceremony." On this occasion he received in Religion the name of Brother Joseph.

From month to month, as the great end of the religious life opened up before his mental vision, and when he found so abundantly provided for him in his state as a Christian Brother, all the great means of attaining this end — meditation, vocal prayer, pious reading, examen of conscience, the abiding presence of the Blessed Sacrament in the House, and the great work of Christian education — his joy, peace, fervour, and contentment seemed wonderfully great. He wrote to a clergyman from the Novitiate — "I have not yet known what it is to regret the world. If I regretted anything it would be that we had not sooner parted. If those who enter religion late in life fail not to receive some of the peace which it confers, what must it be to the young, who give it their morning, and their noon with all the freshness and vigour of their early affections."

Again he writes to a friend — "I would despair of giving you any idea of the perfect liberty of mind and happiness one feels in the religious state (when it is not one's own fault), and which it is in his power to increase every day and hour." And of the work of the Institute, in which he took the greatest delight, and for which he was preparing himself with great earnestness, he writes the following — "The holy end of the Institute I have embraced is the Christian education of the male children of the poor, in which charitable work, if the Almighty spare me health and life, I shall have an abundant opportunity of sending far better deeds before me than I fear would ever be my lot to perform amid the distractions and temptations of the world. The good to be done is indeed immense. The only impediment which can come between me and the great reward promised to those who instruct others unto justice is a defect in my own disposition or manner of accomplishing it."

Detachment from the World

His detachment from the world was complete. He was desirous of living unknown, and of placing himself on a level in every respect with those immediately around him, and therefore studiously endeavoured to conceal all superiority. He requested the Master of Novices and the Director of the House not to call him to people coming to visit him. He allowed a most dear and intimate lady friend of his, who had come to North Richmond Street from a distance to see him, to go away without that satisfaction. This was the lady to whom he had dedicated two of his poems, viz., "In the time of my boyhood I had a strange feeling," and "On the ocean that hollows the rocks where ye dwell." His fame as a writer excited the curiosity of many persons of distinction to see him and have the pleasure of speaking with him. Hence it was not easy sometimes to comply with his request. His immediate friends and near relatives called occasionally to see him, but while he received them cordially and affectionately, he did not remain long with them nor encourage their frequent visits.

His indifference to literary reputation was particularly striking. During the whole time he was with the Brothers he was never heard even once to speak of his writings except in private conversation with the Master of Novices, who was himself a literary character, and who had even then to introduce the subject himself. He was sensibly affected and blushed like a child at the least word said in his praise, and he himself avoided everything directly or indirectly that could incite it.

How beautiful and how worthy of a saint are the following extracts from his shorthand (stenography) notes:—

Sweetly abandon your friends and all, O my soul, into the hands of God. He will take care of you and them if you serve Him sincerely and faithfully. Do not be solicitous about such and such friends in whose salvation you feel an interest. Is not our Lord Jesus more desirous of their salvation than

you can possibly be? Those anxieties can only serve to withdraw you from the care of your own soul, and make you lose the opportunities of salvation mercifully afforded you.

As for writing new tales, or in fact doing any literary work, poems or historical matter, religious or otherwise, from the moment he had fairly entered on his new mode of life he manifested the greatest disinclination to take a pen in his hand; he could not bear the idea of it. The Brothers did not in the least urge him upon the subject, but left him altogether to himself. They hoped that this feeling would gradually die away, and that a fondness for literary work would return in due time. In this they were not disappointed.

Transfer to Cork

The Novitiate was transferred to the Monastery, Our Lady's Mount, Cork, in 1839, and on the 18th June of that year, Gerald, now Brother Joseph, was, with some other novices, sent on to the "beautiful citie." The Brothers' House in Cork is situated on a hill commanding one of the finest views of the city and suburbs, and, being at the north side, is frequently styled the "North Monastery." The Brothers began their work of Christian education in Cork in 1811; but the present monastery and schools were not completed until 1816. Gerald writes to a friend in Limerick:

North Monastery, June, 1839 — You will see by the above date that I am somewhat nearer to you than when I wrote last. I have been here a fortnight, and am no way dissatisfied with the change of scene.

Again, in the October following, he writes to a friend in London:—

North Monastery, Cork. — I was ordered off here from Dublin last June, and have been since enlightening the craniums of the wondering Paddies of this quarter, who learn from me with profound amazement and profit that O X spells ox; that the top of a map is the north, and the bottom the south, with various other branches, as also that they ought to be good boys, and do as they are bid, and say their prayers every morning and evening, etc; and yet it seems curious even to myself that I feel a great deal happier in the practice of the daily routine than I did while I was roving about your great city, absorbed in the modest project of rivalling Shakespeare and throwing Scott in the shade.

The Master of Novices, Brother Bernard Duggan, arrived at Our Lady's Mount, Cork, six months after the transfer of the Novices to that House, and from him many interesting particulars relative to Brother Joseph's religious life therein, and of his happy but premature death, have been derived. Brother Joseph had the highest esteem and most affectionate regard for this venerable Brother, under whose guidance he was placed, and reposed in him the greatest confidence, making him the repository of his inmost thoughts. The writer of this brochure had not the happiness of knowing Brother Joseph, but had the pleasure as a member of the Cork community of a thirty years' residence with Brother B. Duggan, from whom he obtained many interesting particulars relative to Gerald. These will be found in what follows.

Life in Cork Community

The year Brother Joseph spent in the Cork community was one of real pleasure to him. He enjoyed great internal peace, liked much the house and grounds and rural walks, and was delighted with the work in the schools. At recreation with the Brothers he seemed a picture of happiness. His

conversation was free and lively, and he often amused the community with story and song. "Those Evening Bells," and the "Baby Lay Sleeping," were great favourites with him. He would occasionally relate a story of considerable length, entering into details, and imitating the peculiar phraseology of the peasantry, the whole flowing from him as smoothly as if he were reading from a book. His memory was very remarkable and most exact. A custom in the Novitiate at that time was to read a page from a good author, and then get each novice to try and reproduce it as nearly as possible to the original. This exercise was intended to improve the memory, and enable the Brothers to speak correctly, fluently, and elegantly. Gerald would accomplish this task word for word with the original.

In September, four months after his coming to Cork, his brother, the Doctor, came from Limerick to see him. "Brother Joseph," he says, "seemed as happy as possible, and he spoke to me warmly of the extreme kindness of the Brothers. 'You never saw such people,' he said, 'they are so kind and so attentive; I cannot give you the least idea of it; and not to me only, but to every member of the community.'" The Doctor got leave for Brother Joseph to accompany him to see their sister, who had entered the Presentation Convent, Youghal. "The day," the Doctor says in his *Life of Gerald*, "was beautiful. We took outside seats on the coach (no railways then, 1839), and he was in the highest spirits. We had several conversations about literature and literary people; all his old recollections seemed to revive, and he spoke on these subjects with an ardour and warmth of expression that quite surprised me, yet with a degree of calmness that showed they were now no longer capable of disturbing his peace." They returned to the monastery in the evening after a very pleasant day. He did not see the Doctor again until a few hours before his death, in June, 1840. Doctor Dan, as he was familiarly called, was a gifted man, and most affectionately attached to Gerald.

Religious Character and Virtues

In the discharge of all his religious duties Brother Joseph was a model novice. His esteem for the religious state and his relish for spiritual exercises increased daily. Of his happiness therein he says that "No one has or can have any idea of the happiness of life in a religious community without having actually experienced it." The Master of Novices gave the following account of him to his brother, the Doctor: "He (Gerald) would have no exemptions in anything; not a virtue to the perfection of which he did not aspire; profound humility, strict obedience, conformity to the Divine Will in the most trifling incidents, a habit of prayer and union with God, and an ardent zeal to promote His glory, were the striking virtues by which he was characterised; he wished to be the first and most laborious at every duty." Again, "His piety was of the most absorbing character; prayer accompanied him through every duty; even while he conversed with others his heart was with God; and in the times set apart for prayer he was totally lost to everything else; his look, his posture, his whole demeanour, were expressive of the most profound forgetfulness of everything earthly; so absorbed indeed was he on some occasions that he seemed insensible to the passing of time and perfectly unconscious of the presence of others." To conclude, he further adds — "Nothing could exceed the earnestness with which he discharged every duty; nothing was done by halves — nothing imperfect; he seemed as if he had nothing else to do but what he was doing."

The Superior-General, Brother Michael Paul O'Riordan, related to the brother, Doctor Dan, an instance of this complete absorption of Gerald in prayer, which he himself had often witnessed. "There is a little oratory," writes the Superior, "near the entrance to the school-room, where it is

customary for the Brothers, before entering the school, to spend a few moments in prayer before proceeding to the duty of instruction. I have seen Gerald often, after kneeling there, according to custom, become so absorbed in his devotions that he seemed quite to forget himself, and remain so long in this religious abstraction that it was evident he lost all consciousness of the duty he came to discharge."

The resolutions found in his shorthand notes on this head are so striking that they must prove edifying. We give a few. On prayer — "Prayer I consider the first of all my duties: it must never have a second place in my affections." Again — "I will never commence prayer without calling to mind what I am going to do, its necessity and importance." And again, on entering the oratory, "I will fix my heart with all the strength of my affections on the Holy Sacrament before which I kneel, and thus will I secure respect, attention, and an ardent spirit of devotion."

Public Interest and Teaching Work

During the twelve months he spent in Cork he adhered firmly to his resolve not to meet people who called to see him through mere curiosity. Still many found a means of gratifying this desire. "The Collegians," his master-piece, was in everybody's hands at the time, and his fame as a writer and poet had reached its highest. It is not to be wondered at then that people should desire to see the gifted author, especially one who had forsaken the world "in all his noon of fame." A large number of visitors came ostensibly to see the schools (then sufficiently attractive in themselves), but in reality to see the "great writer," not indeed to speak to him, but to see him in the school-room, or class teaching as they passed through. He was fond, while in Cork, at his leisure time, of going into the garden and dressing some flower beds. He had a habit of note-taking. He seemed never to lose an opportunity of jotting down in shorthand, which he wrote neatly, anything interesting or curious that turned up: a beautiful or peculiar phase of the heavens, or the surrounding scenery, which was very fine at all seasons, the singing of the birds, remarks in conversation, or striking thoughts passing through his own mind. His note-books, some of which are still preserved, are full of these. He taught his system of stenography to the Master of Novices, who fortunately was able to translate them into ordinary writing after Gerald's death.

Brother Bernard Duggan once asked him how he got such a command over the phraseology of the peasantry, and such an intimate acquaintance with their manners and customs. His reply was that he went from time to time and actually lived among them, sleeping at the farmers' houses, sitting at the fireside with the farmer and his family, talking freely to the servant boys and girls, hearing them tell stories, describe events, and drop out unconsciously their humour and wit. Of all these he took notes. He had a most intimate acquaintance with every part of the country where he lived. He spent days and nights wandering about exploring its beauties, conversing with the country people, and gathering every grey legend floating among the inhabitants. He told the following incident, which indicated what the people thought about him:— One summer's day, being much fatigued with scouring the country, he went into a wayside inn for refreshments. The lady of the place bade him step up to the parlour and he would be presently attended to. The waiter, an elderly man, was told to go up and see what the gentleman required. His reply to the lady of the shop was — "Begor, I won't, ma'am, for that man would have me in his book to-morrow if I did."

As the great work of the Brothers is the Christian education of the children, we have it on the highest authority, his own action and sentiments, that he took the greatest interest in this work. His prayers were offered for the necessary lights and graces for the direction and instruction of the

children. His notes are full of resolutions as to his mode of teaching the boys. He wishes to be gentle towards them, to humble his mind so as to suit his language and ideas to the capacity and often dullness of their intellects, not to condemn them, but to regard them as the dearest portion of the Church on account of their innocence, and often as the most cherished by his Divine Master on account of their poverty. He resolves to watch over his own passions, anger, pride, and self-love, and to subdue them, that he may become a model to the children of patience, meekness, and generosity. He will bear with their defects and annoyances, and treat them on all occasions with paternal affection, even while correcting them with firmness he will be considerate for their weakness and the tenderness of their age. He had a great command over his pupils, and they a great respect and affection for him. The boys were not, however, conscious that their master was the author of "The Collegians," and one of Erin's sweetest poets. They may have heard such was the case, but even so their thoughtlessness and youth made them soon forget the fact; hence this knowledge could not be the motive for their respect, affection, and ready obedience; it arose solely from the master's self-possession, kindly demeanour, and the careful manner in which he prepared his lessons before entering school. The boys made progress under him, and they felt that they did progress. As a rule boys are easily governed when they are conscious of improving, and of receiving kindly and affectionate treatment. The history and geography lessons were carefully prepared, as his notes testify. The religious instructions which he delivered were the result of reflection and much religious study, and deeply impressed his young audiences. Great method and logical sub-division characterised all his teaching, religious and secular. The Master of Novices and the Brothers who lived with Brother Joseph bear testimony to his great success as a Christian teacher. Several of his pupils, now men advanced in life, both in Cork and in Dublin, remember his graceful appearance, kindly manner, zeal for their advancement, and speak of him with pride and pleasure. His General Monitor, or principal pupil, still lives, and when interviewed about his old master, becomes eloquent in describing his style of teaching, treatment of the boys, discipline of the school, order and neatness of all around, his little plans and dispositions of things for the smooth working of the school and improvement of the children. This gentleman, now advanced in life, and a respected citizen of Cork, is still a frequent visitor to the schools, Our Lady's Mount, in that city. He points out the room (No. 10) where Brother Joseph taught, shows his usual place of sitting, and where he stood when giving directions. This gentleman's countenance would brighten up when speaking of Brother Joseph's sweet face, gentlemanly demeanour, warm grasp of the hand and affectionate kind words with his pupils.

Academic Studies and Literary Work

Whatever mathematical knowledge Brother Joseph had acquired in his school-days was in great part lost by the entire devotion of his mind to literature, and the engrossing work of an author. On entering our Institute he felt the want of this kind of knowledge very keenly, as he found himself face to face almost daily with the commercial work in the schools, for which a considerable acquaintance with mathematics would be required. To this department of study then he applied himself diligently, and had made considerable progress during his too short religious career. When asked to devote some of his study-time to the writing of works of fiction, his reply was that seeing how much he stood in need of a knowledge of the exact sciences, he could not think of diverting his thoughts from this and other school subjects so necessary for a teacher until he had mastered a sufficient amount. His superiors allowed him to pursue this line of action. However, he assisted in compiling the first edition of the Literary Class Book (now the Sixth Book), and wrote a series of

Scripture Lessons for another of the Class Books. The Bible he used for this purpose is still religiously preserved in Cork. When asked by the Superior of the Cork Community if he thought the "Sister of Charity," one of his own poems, would suit the Literary Class Book, he unaffectedly replied that he thought it would. The only other composition which he wrote, save what shall appear later on, was the poem on Miss Nano Nagle, Foundress of the Presentation Nuns— "'Twas the garden of Christendom tended with care." This he did at the request of Br. Baptist Leonard, then Director of Cork; but he did not himself seem pleased with the piece, and remarked that he never did well anything of that kind which he was asked to do. His muse, it would seem, should be left quite free.

The Superiors of the Institute and the Master of Novices were all most anxious that he should devote himself, once he had received the Habit, almost exclusively to the writing of religious and moral tales, &c., for the benefit of the Catholic world at large, and hence they were willing to exempt him from teaching save what he might do for a change of occupation as a recreation. His great talents for literary work led the Superiors to the proposing of this course. But Gerald thought otherwise, and requested that he might be allowed to pursue his vocation as a Christian teacher. The Superiors did not press further. However, Brother Joseph promised that later on, when he would have mastered the necessary branches for school purposes, he would devote himself to the writing of interesting works. There was nothing more about this matter during his stay in Dublin and part of his time in Cork.

Return to Literary Work

He was not, however, long stationed in Cork when he received a letter from Mrs. Rhoda White, New York, his niece-in-law, wife of Judge White, Gerald's nephew. This lady, herself an authoress, and a person of very refined literary taste, pointed out to Gerald in her note that it was a pity he would not employ his great ability in writing religious and moral tales for the benefit of the Catholic world, when Wesleyans and others were inundating the market with well-written religious works injurious to the faith of Catholic young people. This letter had had an almost immediate effect on his resolution. The morning following the receipt of this note he met the Master of Novices and asked him what he thought of the contents of his niece's letter. He replied that he considered the lady's remarks very sensible and much to the point. Gerald then asked what he ought to do in the matter. "To write," replied the Master of Novices. "What kind of work do you consider I ought to write — religious or secular — for the rich or for the poor?" inquired Gerald. "You know your own powers best," replied the Novice Master; "but," he added, "perhaps if you combined all it would be best." "Well," said Gerald, "I will do something." The Master of Novices then told him that he could write in his room during study time, but this privilege he declined on the ground that he did not wish to be absent from any common exercise. "I can open a book and put it standing on its edges before me," he said, "and those beside me will not know what I am doing." The unfinished tale, "Holy Island," was the result of this conversation. The original manuscript is preserved in the Cork House. It is written on carbonized paper, which he used to prepare himself, and he wrote with an ivory style. In this way he could produce several copies together by the one impression. The manuscript is neatly written, letters small but distinct, few erasures or corrections. The tale, as far as it goes, is most interesting. The final sentence, which was the last he wrote, is very remarkable. It runs thus:— "Of the things of this world they (the druid priests) are well informed, but of the abyss

that lies beyond—" When he had proceeded thus far the bell rang; he laid down his pen, leaving the last word unfinished — the "d" is wanting. His fatal illness commenced soon after.

The following incident was related by the Novice Master:— On the eve of St. Patrick's Day, 1840, Gerald asked leave to employ the evening in making "Patrick's Crosses" for the younger part of his pupils to wear on their caps or shoulders in honour of the national apostle on the following day. There in the study he could be seen with his paper, compasses, colours, brushes, working away, wholly absorbed in what he felt would give much pleasure to the young Cork people. While Brother Joseph was thus engaged, Brother John Wiseman— an ancient Brother of the community, and a highly gifted man — happened to come to the study room, and seeing Brother Joseph thus occupied at the "Patrick's Crosses," and, overcome by the strangeness of the sight, putting his hands to his mouth, burst into a loud fit of laughter; and when asked by the Novice Master why he disedified the novices by his uncontrolled laughter at a time of silence, replied, smiling, that he could not resist when he saw the author of "The Collegians" so engaged.

Spiritual Life and Prayer

The following beautiful prayer, composed during one of his Retreats while in the Novitiate, North Richmond Street, Dublin, and translated from his shorthand notes after his death, was in the hands of many of the Brothers in Cork, who had it by heart, and were accustomed to recite it through devotion:—

"My Favourite Solitude"

Let my most cherished solitude be the tomb of my adorable Redeemer (as it suggested itself to me during my Retreat). Before this silent, and wounded, and disfigured Body let me always keep myself recollected, in holy love, compunction, and detachment from the world. Into this holy sepulchre let me continually retire, so that the mortification of my dear Redeemer's sacred corpse may enter deep into my heart and produce there a lasting effect. Let this sweet and silent retreat be my refuge from worldly thoughts and distractions, and may I keep myself so continually in my Saviour's grave that it may be neither a surprise nor an alarm to me when I shall be called to enter into my own. O silent tomb! torn and wounded corpse! be you henceforth the object of all my love on earth, of all my happiness in this dying life, my refuge against everything that would sully the purity of my heart. My dear dead Redeemer, may I ever keep Thee present to my mind and heart.

Final Illness and Death

Before his entrance into religion he had been subject to palpitations, which returned to him from time to time, but never seemed to cause him any apprehensions. When recovered from the depression which these caused he was as cheerful and communicative as ever. His brother says of him during the time that elapsed from his visit to him until his death, that is from September, 1839, to June, 1840:— "The remaining months of his religious life were spent with the same piety, energy, and cheerful unbroken content that I have already described." He had a sharp, feverish attack six weeks before his death, which obliged him to keep to bed for eight days. From this he recovered, though not fully. Early in June he had a walk in the country, and when he had returned made a short visit to the Blessed Sacrament in the oratory. Here he got into a swoon and fell off the prie-dieu. He was removed to his room, and though somewhat better that evening still he never again left his cell.

The doctor was in attendance early next morning. His ailment seemed at first nothing more than an ordinary cold, but a few days later the two medical men who examined him pronounced his case serious, and stated that he had got typhus fever.

On finding his illness taking a serious turn Brother Joseph immediately concluded that his end was come. He called the Brother in attendance on him to his bedside, and said, "I think I shall die of this sickness, and I wish to receive the last Sacraments." His confessor, the Very Rev. Michael O'Sullivan, a gifted priest, Vicar-General of the diocese, and founder of the beautiful church and convent of the Vincentian Fathers in Cork, was providentially then in the monastery, and he proceeded at once, as requested, to administer the last consolations of religion, although he did not believe then there was such an immediate necessity for doing so. However, Brother Joseph was right; the end was at hand. "He received the last Sacraments with the most lively sentiments of love and resignation as well as with the utmost fervour and devotion," writes an eye-witness, and adds—"During his illness not a murmur or sigh of impatience escaped him; not a sentiment but breathed love, confidence, and resignation; not a desire but for the perfect accomplishment of the will of Him to whom his habits of prayer had so long and so closely united him."

His brother, Doctor Dan, was immediately written for to Limerick. At this period there was no train or telegraph communication. He arrived in time just to be barely recognised by him and to witness his death. Doctor Denis O'Connor, who prescribed for Gerald, was one of the most eminent of his time, and maintained this high reputation during a period of more than half a century. Some years before his death he was elected President of the British Medical Association, one of the most exalted positions in the profession. Hence, having had the services of such a physician, all that could be done to prolong life was done.

At seven o'clock on Friday morning, 12th June, 1840, in his 37th year, died Br. Gerald Joseph Griffin. The grief in the community, throughout the city, and the whole country, was deep and sincere. His premature death was a loss to the nation and the cause of religion. His writings have made him a favourite wherever the English language is spoken, and especially among all of Irish descent. The solemn High Mass celebrated on the occasion was numerously attended by the clergy, and his remains were followed to their resting-place in the little cemetery in the monastery grounds by his sorrowing brethren and a large attendance of the citizens. This took place on the Monday following his death, 15th June. The rain fell heavily during the interment. The funeral oration was pronounced in the graveyard by the Very Rev. Father Michael O'Shea, the Archdeacon, a very eloquent preacher. His opening words were — "Dearly beloved brethren, you stand on the grave of no ordinary Irishman." He dwelt on the virtues that formed his beautiful character, humility, modesty, sweetness of disposition, the result of self-conquest, his charity and brotherly affection, his love of prayer and lively faith in the mysteries of our holy religion. He then touched on his love of his state and zeal for the work of instruction, and finally dwelt on the character of his writings, the sweetness and eloquence of his poetry, the humour, fidelity to nature, deep, patriotic feeling, masterly unfolding of the secret springs of action of the human heart, and the marvellous play of the passions, all so charmingly and powerfully displayed in his numerous tales and writings; but the preacher pointed out, above all, the pure, religious and moral tone pervading all ever penned, and concluded by stating that if Brother Gerald Joseph Griffin were now to stand with pen in his fingers, and all his works spread out before him in the presence of his great Judge, not one line that he ever wrote would he have to efface.

His Legacy and Influence

Literature has lost one of its brightest ornaments, Erin one of her most loving and brilliant sons, and his Order and the Church one of the most devoted children.

Through life Gerald seemed to have some presentiment that he would die young. This idea developed strongly towards the close of his religious career. The following passage from the "Notes of one of his Meditations made during a Retreat," and bearing on this point, will be interesting. Speaking to himself he says:

Apply diligently to prayer, be exact and attentive to meditation. Be generous in giving your time to God; do not fear to throw yourself into His arms; serve Him courageously, it will soon be over! The night will soon come, very soon; a few days and there will be no more talk of you; make friends then beforehand in the land to which you are going, and which is much nearer than you think.

His apprehension of an early death is evident from the touching poem which he wrote early in life. A few of the first stanzas are here given—

In the time of my boyhood I had a strange feeling
That I was to die ere the noon of my day
Not quietly into the silent grave stealing,
But torn like a blasted oak sudden away.

That even in the hour when enjoyment was keenest,
My lamp should quench suddenly, hissing in gloom;
That even when mine honours were freshest and greenest,
A light should rush over and scatter their bloom.

Oh, friend of my heart! if that doom should fall on me,
And thou shouldst live on to remember my love,
Come oft to my tomb where the turf lies upon me,
And list to the even' wind mourning above.

His Resting Place

Sixty-two years have now elapsed since he breathed his pure soul into the hands of his Creator. During this period his grave has been visited by literary men and women from all parts of the world. Poet and orator and novelist and philosopher have stood on that hallowed spot, and have breathed a prayer for his repose. The shamrocks and daisies growing on his grave have been plucked and carried to the ends of the earth as souvenirs of their pilgrimage to his honoured resting place. They do not bloom often enough to meet the requirements of the many visitors coming month after month through each succeeding year. The blades of grass themselves must supply the place of the more cherished productions of nature. His merits have been proclaimed in prose and verse. Few writers have found so rare a nook in the affections of his countrymen as the author of the "The Collegians." His writings are cherished to-day as when first given to the world. The increase of his fame and the growing affection for his memory prove the high merit and virtuous tendency of his works. Pilgrims to his grave will call to the Brothers' Schools on the same grounds to see where as a Christian Brother he taught the children: then visit the Monastery where he died, and see his portrait or bust, his shorthand notes and unfinished manuscript, and gaze intently on the last words he wrote. The following is his own description of his resting place:—

Half-way down to the schools, on one side, close by the wall, stands a little burying-ground, where the headstones of a few Brothers invite us to a De profundis, and a thought or two on the end of all things as we are passing.

"There lies what was mortal of Gerald Griffin," says one of his gifted admirers, the late Mr. Denny Lane, M.A., B.L. "There, under the shelter of the trees whose shade he often sought, on the side of one of the green hills of Holy Ireland that he loved so deeply, and in view of one of the rivers and valleys he so often painted, there on the path to the school in which he taught, there amongst the reliques of his comrades in the work of religion and of culture, there beneath the dew-drops of heaven, and oft-times in a sunlight as that of his own faith, rests an Irishman of the Irish, a Brother of the Brethren, and a Christian of Christians; these relics will moulder back again into their mother earth, but above and beyond the grave survives the spirit that inspired and will inspire, and the soul that blessing and blessed will retain its influence as long as a heart beats in the breast of an Irish Catholic."
